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ABSTRACT

Business education is being re-examined and reformulated to help students learn to grapple with business problems in new, multidisciplinary ways and to equip them with a deep cross-cultural understanding and a truly global perspective. Business students with highly verbal abilities, compared to those with high math abilities, thrive on complexity and uncertainty and tend to be open-minded, analytic, nonjudgmental, and integrative thinkers. This has resulted in an advocacy for bringing together the disciplines of economics and humanities. Conflicts arise when seemingly disparate disciplines are combined, and the resistance from some faculty to interdisciplinary studies often arises for reasons apart from the intrinsic merit of the courses. However, it behooves the disciplines, particularly the departments of foreign languages which find it difficult to make the transition into meeting student needs for a particular profession, to review their curricula and find ways to gain from each other while creating approaches to learning through course work more adaptable to the needs of the future. Six categories of business or economics novels are outlined, and seven teaching suggestions are offered for the use of fiction as authentic texts in business courses. (Contains 10 references.) (JDD)

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PAPERS ON INTERNATIONALIZING BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

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One of the buzz words we often hear these days, one which hopefully will stay around for a long time, is "integrative." The word is used in conjunction with a variety of other terms, as in the expressions "integrative skills," "integrative semester, "integrative core;" or its use is implied, as in the expression "capstone course." Such notions suggest the concept of "bringing together many skills." The word also faintly connects with other buzz words of the nineties, "software compatible," "interface," which brings together in technology the seemingly incompatible functions of computers. In a response to the dissatisfaction of consumers for the proliferation of hardware which could not merge with each other, the trend in technology is to integrate both software and hardware in order to facilitate work, to keep expenses down, and to reduce or eliminate a common frustration we associate with computers. There are computers, such as the ones used in interactive programs, which combine listening, writing, reading, and viewing all in one machine controlled by a single "plug." That is the ideal. In academia, however, there is no magic plug. There is no central network to facilitate integration. It seems that after our very long affair with specialization, we realize we have forgotten how to pull disparate skills together and reconnect to "the network" for purposes of "problem solving" and for the practical application of analytical skills. How then can we specialize in certain areas and still be able to make broad connections which illuminate problems beyond the narrow limits of our specializations? It seems that in many colleges and universities there is a frenzy of activity for finding the way out of our disconnectedness, while simultaneously learning to handle the saturation of knowledge in our area. Students must concurrently learn the functional skills

required in today's global environment, regaining multidisciplinary talents and developing new ones all at the same time. The cries for integration of knowledge come from every direction.¹ It is no longer seen as a ruse from the liberal arts to ally themselves with business or science in order to survive in the university system. Business departments, instead, have reached out for cooperation with other disciplines in order to enrich and improve business education in a global business environment.

The topic of "reengineering the MBA" has been around for a while. The desire to stay away from what has been perceived, to paraphrase Sylvie Debevec Henning, as the rigid, static model indifferent to historical change: rich in theoretical knowledge but quite unaware of the "ambiguities of global process" (51). In 1989, in response to the Wharton School's specifications in the International Management program, the requirement for social sciences training made its way into the doctoral program. The emphasis of the requirements was placed on "comparative cross-cultural sociology" (Meyer, 18). The impetus for such shift was the realization that, firstly, "as firms internationalize, issues not amenable to economic analysis but amenable to social and political analysis" emerge; secondly, "as firms cross international boundaries, they must pay greater attention to communication and coordination." Lastly, "the political environment also becomes of greater salience than the immediate economic environment." Meyer's article concludes with a call for the restoration of the comparative tradition to the learning process, with the hope that there would be more cooperation between business schools and liberal arts. A recent article, addresses Wharton's "new and improved MBA," focusing on the integrative, multidisciplinary approach of the degree program. A push spearheaded by Prof. John Hershey, professor of management at Wharton brings together in coordinated lectures, "previously

unrelated disciplines" through which "students learn to grapple with business problems in new, multidisciplinary ways" (Fortune, 38).

In Europe, the examination and reformulation of business education is taking a similar path. Bruno Duffor, chief executive of the Lyon Graduate School of Business in France, admits to the "crucial" need for the new MBA graduates to hold "cross disciplinary skills" and hold a mindset "fully open to the international dimension of their activities" (International Herald Tribune, 16). Companies, he adds, want "multi-specialists." It is not enough, the article concludes, for companies in Europe to effectively compete on a global basis simply by becoming lean and mean, through costs cutting and downsizing. This comes on top of the need to "understand foreign languages and cultures and to possess the necessary tools for managing continual change and diversity" (16). One interesting and quite creative approach to the need for teaching how to integrate knowledge from disparate fields come from Eric Briys, dean of the Institut Supérieur des Affaires (ISA) at Jony-en-Josas near Paris. According to Mr. Briys, "[t]here is a tremendous value in the art of 'gazing and deciphering.' By this I mean the ability to look at patterns, areas and fields that at the outset appear completely disconnected, only to discover that in fact a number of hidden relationships may tie them together" (16). As means to learn to perceive these "hidden relationships," Mr. Briys arranged "a course on music as an unexpected model of management to be taught by a well-known French conductor." In its pursuit of improving the student capacity to integrate, ISA goes further in its experimentation and launched a program on ethnology and anthropology, and has worked "jointly with the Louvre Museum." This last project, was not fully explained in the article. I remain quite curious about the infinite possibilities of such a plan. Another attempt by ISA was "to integrate a broad

approach to ethics into its international MBA." The objectives for the new generation of managers in the European arena seem clear:

1. New managers must be "equipped with a deep cross-cultural understanding and a truly global perspective."
2. "The main thrust of management development nowadays is [teaching] how to foster [learning] leadership qualities, and not basic functional areas."
3. Be responsive to the new needs of companies: "the ability of executives to work in multidisciplinary teams" and, I may add, multicultural contexts brought about by the global economy.

The new GMAT, according to William Brocsanle, who runs the program, "will add essay questions to help measure communications skills and creativity" (Fortune, 39).

The correlation between success of the manager of the future and high quantitative skills is seriously questioned with a tendency now to perceive highly verbal abilities as best predictors for future performance. Michael Driver, a professor at the University of Southern California business school, found in his research that the students traditionally chosen by B-schools were those with high math scores over "those with strong verbal scores" (Fortune, 43). In his research he found that students with high math scores "have personality and decision-making traits that work reasonably well in corporations with rigid hierarchies" (43). "The quant jocks," *the article adds*, "were intolerant of uncertainty, surprisingly unanalytical, and uncomfortable with complex data. They weren't social, artistic, or enterprising, either. The highly verbal, Driver discovered, thrive on complexity and uncertainty. They tended to be open-minded, analytic, nonjudgmental, and better at integrative thinking-using scattered bits of information to develop a big picture.

"Verbal types", *the researcher says*, "take in a lot of data, but instead of jumping to one conclusion, they proceed on intuition, relying on teamwork and using persuasion to involve others" (43).

The closest to this idea of the "integrative" many people in academia have attained occurred during the times when "multidisciplinary studies" served as the goal. As we know, some colleges and departments continue to resist making the transition toward a "multidisciplinary" focus, in part, because of the reluctance of educators to work together with other departments. Nevertheless, integrating disciplines has succeeded in isolated cases. It has been in place for decades in the studies of literature, as exemplified by the well established and respected field of Comparative Literature. The idea of interdisciplinary studies such as law or science in conjunction with literature has been around for a long time. The book *Interrelations of Literature*, published by the Modern Language Association of America, introduces the reader to essays on the relations between literature and myth, psychology, sociology, religion, linguistics, philosophy, politics, law, science, folklore, the visual arts, and film; history and biography had already been considered in an earlier volume. Omitted due to "limitations of space," were the topics connecting literature to economics, dance, anthropology and theater. In spite of the omission of economics, this discipline is regularly taught in the U.S. with either a perspective from the liberal arts, or a field of study within the business schools. Charles P. Kindleberger raised doubts about the high valuation placed on economics as taught in some business schools in the U.S.. He advocates for the "literary or anecdotal intuitive economics," and adds that perhaps both methods, the inductive and the deductive, should be used in the study of economics (7). All in all his words may be best summarize by his desire to bring closer

together the disciplines of economics and those in the humanities. Regarding the presence of ambiguity in the general curricula, he adds, "Business schools, may not have enough, and liberal arts too much ambiguity" (7).

After several decades of developing the independent, autonomous disciplines, we find that we have difficulties integrating their disparate perspectives when they leave the role of training the traditional major, or specialist. In a business curriculum, such as the one in which I teach whose intended mission is the preparation of "individuals for management positions in many cultures," and to "equip graduates to perform effectively and ethically in a global environment," language instruction needs must "differ from those associated with a traditional language and literature curriculum." But shaping the curriculum to serve "the needs of professional programs," has never been popular among the well established literature departments, to the point of outright contempt for language teaching. Says Sylvie Devebec Henning, "[b]y virtue of our degrees and accomplishments, we are fundamentally not language instructors and tend to resist attempts to comprehend our careers largely in terms of a paradigm appropriate to secondary school instruction" (52). She fears that "the growing hostility toward literature, particularly foreign literature, in the United States . . . also fosters the sort of polarization that . . . may threaten our existence as distinct academic entities" (52). This concern for the preservation of the "distinct academic entities" does not compel Prof. Devebec Henning to dismiss the value and role of literature in the new global approach of professional degree within our system. On the contrary, I was glad to see, that in the remaining of the article the author comes to an accommodation with the impending modifications of the foreign language curricula, to which topic I'll return later.

Jonathan Cullers, editor of *Interrelations of Literature* opens his volume with the suggestion that the role of literature in the curriculum should be "centrifugal" rather than "centripetal." "The centripetal approach," he explains, "is an entity unto itself, as a single, coherent, self-contained, self-existent art, just as some choose to study a literary work within the frontiers of a single, self-sufficient, national language" (iv). Although Cullers recognizes the value, this approach fails because, as he declares, it denies "literature its centrifugal spirit - [its] tendency not only to cross international borders, both artistically and intellectually, but also to intersect with other forms of art and knowledge." He extols the use of comparative literature, which treats the study of literature as "progressively more interdisciplinary as well as interliterary." He continues his exposition with an argument which is at the core of multidisciplinary studies:

Through this important development in modern scholarship [the appearance of comparative literature] literature is being restored to its pristine position as a central cognitive resource in society, as its most faithful and comprehensive interpreter. It is an art but more than an art, for, while being itself, literature extends outside itself to forms of human experience beyond disciplinary boundaries, making it evident that the rigid separation of disciplines by myopic specializations can in the long run lead only to counterproductive and paralyzing isolation. Literature, as the hub of the wheel of knowledge, provides the logical locus for the integration of knowledge (iv).

Some disciplines traditionally entwined with literature seem more readily adaptable than others to integration, such as music, religion and myth. Others, are not. For example, John H.

Wigmore introduces the topic of law and literature very timidly well aware of the elusive nature of the notion in his *A List of Legal Novels*. He opens his study with the question, "And what pray, is a 'legal' novel? The illegalities in which great novelists have figured have commonly been not suits for libels committed, but gallant struggles . . . to protect their copyright against pirates, or to vindicate themselves . . . against envenomed reviewers" (3). Wigmore's intentions, as he clearly stated, was to prepare, as a guide for law students and lawyers, a list of those works of fiction which should be read by lawyers because of the points of law discussed in the works. Readings such works would, presumably, aid readers in becoming better lawyers, or would familiarize them with particular points of law discussed in the works. More recently Richard Weisberg has expanded the list of novels, and reformulated the four categories, (or "kinds of novels," as Wigmore termed them) used to delimit the legal novel.

- A. Works in which a full legal procedure is depicted, sometimes exclusively a "trial scene," but just as frequently the preliminary investigations leading to the trial.
- B. Works in which, even in the absence of a formal legal process, a lawyer is a central figure in the plot or story, frequently but not always the protagonist.
- C. Works in which a specific body of laws, often a single statute or system of procedures, becomes an organizing structural principle.
- D. Works in which, in an otherwise nonlegal framework, the relationships between law, justice, and the individual become a central theme.

Borrowing that archetype and applying it to the world of business and economics we may establish the following criteria:

- A. Works in which a business exchange is depicted giving importance to the procedures

(strategies, style, techniques) that embed the transaction in a particular or specific social and cultural environment: to be noted, if possible, the roles of the buyer, seller; details of price, product and market.

B. Works in which, even in the absence of a formal business transaction, a business agent is a central figure in the plot or story, frequently serving as the protagonist."

C. Works in which [a specific business transaction, or an economic decision] becomes an organizing structural principle.

D. Works in which, in an otherwise non [business] framework, the relation [between business, economics] and the individual becomes a central theme.

E. Works which present aspects of the history of a particular economic period as the main plot of a story or as a subtext;

F. Works presenting the "social conflict between the alienated individual and society" which reflect:

- * old economic structures in crisis;

- * the prevalent old economic structure coexisting in a modern world with a new economic order (very common in the Latin American novel);

- * the incipient free market economies in conflict with old traditions;

- * the presence of new cultural influences from a foreign culture, many times unwelcome and deemed harmful to the social health of a particular society, such as marketing, advertising and the concept of maximizing profit at all costs (capitalism vs. less aggressive local strategies).

A procedure in which to consider curriculum changes in foreign language departments using fiction to provide as authentic texts may follow an approach not totally unknown to many

professors of literature, particularly those who teach using thematic strategies, or who engage in practice sociological, political readings of the texts. For example:

1. Organize courses around a societal unit; such as a particular, for example, social class or some broad theme such as rural Latin America.
2. Use a comparative approach, which can be introduced in a session of pre reading activities.
3. Develop a unit which combines the study of the "historical development of social, political, and economic institutions, or the sources of a foreign culture' values, practices, and attitudes" (Devebec Henning, 53).
4. As the student increases his/her "reader range" interpretative skills can be improved. Lead the students from parallel elemental language structures and topics, to more advanced ones.
5. Choose intended learning outcomes for the courses that are "doable" and measurable. Don't start with the study of *El Cid*. However, the Cid can be a good example, only for lecture/discussion purposes on the role of economics in the Cid's enterprise (the episode of the *Trato de Martín Antolínez con los judíos*. (Raquel e Vidas and the "arcas de arena"). This functions as a bit of economic history that the students may integrate with other information about European economic history of the times.
6. Avoid survey courses which present material in chronological order. Choose introductory courses that put an emphasis on "significant issues within given epochs" (Devebic Henning).
7. Look for the multiple levels present in literary texts.

The conflict that arises when seemingly disparate disciplines are combined and the resistance from some colleagues to interdisciplinary studies often arises for reasons apart from the intrinsic merit of many of these courses and experiments in learning. The issues seem to shift from a discussion on the value of innovative proposals to the politics of such proposals. This type of resistance is characterized mainly by opposition to the teaching of courses by others outside a particular department, believing that the information to be delivered lies solely within their particular fields. The common struggle "to protect one's turf" is buttressed with arguments including: the instructor is not qualified; the teacher hasn't published in the field; the teacher has not published significant works in the field; he/she lacks academic qualifications; the course "belongs" in "our department"; the course doesn't fit in the program; the course can't fit in our curriculum because of the credit hours . . .; and on and on in a similar vein. Proposals hung up in the most amazing network of bureaucratic regulations and formalistic jargon. Rather than getting the bugs out of innovative proposals they are rejected outright.

The students' objections deal with more practical reasons; many of the students may not be readers of fiction in their own language; the reading of literature was a necessary evil left behind in their undergraduate education; fiction presents the world of the emotions and in the view of some students in a business curricula there is nothing more absurd than to bring emotions into play when dealing with business. Most of the students come from undergraduate degrees in exact or semi exact sciences; have been working for a few years prior to graduate work and are interested in hands on experience, cases, and the simulation of real business situations; in summary: professional schools should only teach 'vocational' skills. With the arrival of "integration" and "globalization" at so many levels, such reasoning belongs to a past

that has run its purpose and merits. It behooves the disciplines, particularly the departments of foreign languages which find it difficult to make the transition into meeting student needs for a particular profession, to review its curricula and find ways to gain from each other while creating approaches to learning through course work more adaptable to the needs of the future.

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Endnotes

1. In a recent note, Janeen Klinger, appeals to the use of history in the teaching of international politics. Her reasoning for such integration is based on the following:

a. "For the teacher of international politics, the transformation of the international system provides a unique opportunity to examine key intellectual constructs for their continued descriptive power and unity."

b. "An historical frame of reference is also crucial for enabling students to make the comparisons necessary for understanding the dialogue between the two dominant approaches in the subfield of international relations."

c. The author reminds us of the intellectual pitfalls that ignorance in history leads thinkers by quoting Stanley Hoffman words, 'we are tempted to exaggerate either continuity with a past that we know badly, or the radical originality of the present.'

d. "students need to distinguish transitory conditions from more lasting trends in international affairs"

e. "Without such . . . basic historical knowledge the international relations of the twentieth century is almost unintelligible."